



University of Hawaii at Manoa

Environmental Center
Crawford 317 • 2550 Campus Road
Honolulu, Hawaii 96822
Telephone (808) 948-7361

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SR 230 SCR 248
OBJECTING TO THE PROPOSAL TO TRANSPORT AND INCINERATE
NERVE GAS WEAPONS AT THE JOHNSTON ATOLL
CHEMICAL AGENT DISPOSAL SYSTEM PROJECT

Statement for Senate Committee on
Government Operations
April 5, 1990

By
Jacquelin Miller, Environmental Center
John Harrison, Environmental Center

SR 230 calls attention to the Johnston Atoll Chemical Agent Disposal System Project and in particular the present plans to transport and incinerate, at Johnston Atoll, chemical weapons assigned to U.S. forces in Europe.

Our statement on this resolution does not represent an institutional position of the University of Hawaii.

While we share the general repugnance for chemical weapons and certainly are concerned for the safety of those who may be at risk from their disposal, it is this very concern that prompts us to express our reservations as to the appropriateness of this resolution.

It is our understanding that the United States military has maintained chemical weapons in Europe and continued storage and/or disposal of the European stockpile in Europe is prohibited under existing international agreements. The key issue therefore is not whether or not incineration should be allowed but rather where can it be accomplished with the least risk to human health and the environment.

The incineration facility at Johnston Atoll was expressly designed to dispose of such weapons. More importantly, Johnston Atoll is an exceptionally isolated atoll, hence incineration there poses a minimal risk to either the environment or individuals on the atoll. The munitions proposed to be transported from Europe are of the same type currently stored safely on Johnston Atoll. On the other hand, construction and operation of a facility in either Europe or on the East Coast of the Mainland would risk exposure to tens of thousands of people and cost millions of dollars.

The munitions proposed for transport and incineration will be packaged in double containers for shipping. These containers consist of an inner steel, vapor tight container with a sampling port to allow for monitoring of agent before opening. Ten of these inner containers will be packaged inside military shipping containers (MILVANS) which have dimensions of 20 x 8 x 8 feet. The MILVANS will be monitored before and after unloading.

Eight alternate disposal locations for the European stockpile were considered all but one of which involve high risk cross country transport. Aberdeen Proving Ground, near Edgewood, Maryland is the one exception not requiring cross country transport. This proposed facility is located near the ecologically sensitive Chesapeake Bay and is to be operated for destruction of only mustard agent (not GB or VX). In addition the proposed equipment will not be able to disassemble or destroy projectiles.

Again, while we share the general concern for the incineration of hazardous wastes, we believe that the proposed incineration of U.S. weapon supplies at Johnston Atoll is the most socially and environmentally responsible solution to a difficult problem.